

The White House “Intelligence Assessment” Is No-Such-Thing: It Shows Support for Al-Qaeda

By [Moon of Alabama](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

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The Trump White House published three and a half pages of accusations against the governments of Syria and Russia. These are simple white pages with no header or footer, no date, no classification or declassification marks, no issuing agency and no signatures. It is indiscernible who has written them.

U.S. media call this a [Declassified U.S. Report on Chemical Weapons Attack](#). [It is](#) no such thing.

It starts with

“The United States is confident that the Syrian government conducted a chemical weapon attack, ...”

The U.S. (who exactly is that?) “is confident”, it does not “know”, it does not have “proof” – it is just “confident”.

The whole paper contains only seven paragraphs that are allegedly a “Summary of the U.S. intelligence community assessment” on the issue. The seven paragraphs are followed by eight(!) paragraphs that try to refute the Russian and Syrian statements on the issue. Some political fluff makes up the sorry rest.

That “intelligence community assessment” chapter title is likely already a false claim. Even a fast tracked, preliminary National Intelligence Assessment, for which all seventeen U.S. intelligence agencies must be heard, [takes at least two to three weeks](#) to create. A “long track” full assessment takes two month or more. These are official documents issued by the Director of National Intelligence. The summary assessment the White House releases has no such heritage. It is likely a well massaged fast write up of some flunky in the National Security Council. The release was [backgrounded](#) by dubious statements of an anonymous “Senior Administration Officials” (not by “Intelligence Officials” as has been the case on other such issues.)

The claimed assessment starts with definitely wrong or at least very misleading point:

“We assess that Damascus launched this chemical attack in response to an opposition offensive in Hama province that threatened key infrastructure.”

The Hama offensive had failed two weeks ago. Since then the Syrian army has regained all areas the al-Qaeda “opposition” had captured during the first few days. (Al-Qaeda in Syria renamed itself several times and now calls itself “Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham”.) Key infrastructure had never been seriously threatened by it. Over 2,000 al-Qaeda fighters [were killed](#) in the endeavor.

Peto Lucem, a well known and reliable media source for accurate maps of the war on Syria, posted [on March 31](#), four days before the chemical incident:

Peto Lucem @PetoLucem

NEW MAP: “Rebel” frontline in #Hama is collapsing, #SAA reverses most #AlQaeda gains made in first days of their failed offensive. #Syria



[See bigger picture here](#)

The attack in Hama had already failed days before the chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun happened. Khan Shaykhun is not on the front line. The incident and the failed al-Qaeda attack in Hama can not possibly be related. It makes no sense at all to launch a militarily useless incident in a place far away “in response” to a defeat of the enemy elsewhere – this in a moment where the global political and military situation had turned in favor of the Syrian government. (The Defense Intelligence Agency surely never signed off on such an illogical claim.)

The following paragraphs of the released paper reveal that the assessment is largely based on a “significant body” of “open source reporting” which “indicates” this or that. This means that the White House relied on pictures and videos posted by people who are allowed to operate freely in the al-Qaeda ruled Khan Shaykhun. (Khan Shaikhun had been in the hands of an Islamic State associated group Liwa Al-Aqsa [until mid February](#). The group moved out after fighting al-Qaeda and after slaughtering some 150 of [its fighters](#). Al-Qaeda since moved in and now rules the town and surrounding areas.)

Several of the released video were introduced and commented by Dr. Shajul Islam who has

been removed from the British medical registry and had been [indicted](#) in the UK for his role in kidnapping “western” journalists in Syria. He fled back to Syria. One of the journalists kidnapped with the help of Dr. Shajul Islam, James Foley, was later murdered on camera by the Islamic State. The videos the “doctor” distributed of “rescue” of casualties of the chemical incidents were [not of real emergencies](#) but staged. Under who’s conditions and directions were the many other pictures and [videos](#) taken and published? Why are no female children or young women among the emergency patients and casualties? Why is there no picture or video of where the people were hit by gas and were found? All videos are from “aid stations”, none from “the wild”.

Other videos and photos are by the White Helmets “rescuers”, a U.S./UK financed [propaganda prop](#), which is so “neutral” that it works with [ISIS](#) (vid) and al-Qaeda but not in government held areas where the actual Syrian population lives.

The Hama offensive by “the opposition” was personally planned and directed by the founder and head of al-Qaeda in Syria al-Joliani. [Photos](#) of the planing sessions were published by “opposition” agencies and widely distributed.



[See bigger picture here](#)

The White House paper only talks of “the opposition”. How can there be an “intelligence assessment” (and reporting about it) that does not note that the incident in question took place in an area where AL-QAEDA rules and that the allegedly related (but defeated) offensive was launched by AL-QAEDA. Is AL-QAEDA now officially the “Syrian opposition” the U.S. supports? The neoconned former General Petraeus [lobbied for](#) an open U.S. alliance with al-Qaeda since 2015. The new National Security Advisor to Trump, General McMaster, is a Petraeus protege. He, together with Petraeus, [screwed up Iraq](#). Is the Petraeus alliance now in place?

The next step then will be for the U.S. to informally ally with the Islamic State. The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman is already [arguing for that](#):

We could simply back off fighting territorial ISIS in Syria and make it entirely a problem for Iran, Russia, Hezbollah and Assad. After all, they’re the ones overextended in Syria, not us. Make them fight a two-front war — the moderate rebels on one side and ISIS on the other. If we defeat territorial ISIS in Syria now, we will only reduce the pressure on Assad, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah and enable them to devote all their resources to crushing the last moderate rebels in Idlib, not sharing power with them.

The U.S., Friedman says, should let ISIS run free so it can help al-Qaeda which is ruling in Idleb governate. Friedman talks of “moderate rebels in Idleb” but these are unicorns. They do not exist. There is al-Qaeda and there is the smaller Ahrar al Sham which [compares itself with the Taliban](#). All other opposition fighters in Idleb have joined these two or are now dead.

But why not use these gangs of sectarian mass murderers against the Syrian government and others? Hey, Israel [wants us to do just that](#). And why don't we hand out anti-air missiles to them, Friedman asks, and lend them air-support. This at the same time. Surely the combination will do well.

In Syria, Trump should let ISIS be Assad's, Iran's, Hezbollah's and Russia's headache — the same way we encouraged the mujahedeen fighters to bleed Russia in Afghanistan.

Well, you know, that mujahedeen thing worked out so well that nearly forty years later the U.S. is mulling again to [send additional troops to Afghanistan](#) to defeat them. Do we really want a repeat of that at the borders of Europe?

Lunacy has truly taken over the White House but even more so the U.S. media. How can sanity be brought back to town?

UPDATE:

Professor emeritus at MIT Theodor Postol, a former science adviser to U.S. Navy command and missile expert, has analyzed the “evidence” the White House presented. The short, preliminary report is available [here](#). (I have verified that this is the original one.)

Postol finds nothing in the White House assessment that lets him believe the incident was from an air attack. He finds signs that the incident that was launched on the ground by intentional exploding some container of 122mm ammunition with some other explosives.

He calls the White House assessment amateurish and not properly vetted by competent intelligence analysts who, Postol says, would not have signed off on it in its current form (just as I said above.)

Postol presumes that the incident was with Sarin. He makes no analysis of that White House claim (it is not his field). I don't agree with the Sarin claim. Many other organophosphate substances (pesticides) would be “consistent with” the symptoms displayed or played in the videos and pictures. Some symptoms expected with Sarin, for example heavy convulsions, spontaneous defecation, are not visible in any of the videos or pictures.

I do not concur with Postol on the picture of the alleged impact crater of the “attack”. I have seen several “versions” of the impact crater on social nets with different metal parts, or none, placed in it. Postol seems to have only seen one version. His conclusions from that version seem right. But the crater “evidence” is tainted and to make overall conclusions from it is not easy. I concur though that the crater is not from an air impact but from a ground event. I am not sure though that it is related to the incident at all.

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